The MAID of the FOREST

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SYNOPSIS.

Joseph Hayward, an ensign in the United States army, on his way to Fort Harmar, meets Simon Girty, a renegade whose name has been connected with all manner of atrocities, also headed for Fort Harmar, with a message from the British general, Hamilton. Hayward guides him to the fort. At General Harmar's headquarters Hayward meets Rene D'Auvray, who professes to recognize him, although he has no recollection of ever having seen her before. Hayward volunteers to carry a message for Harmar to Sandusky, where Hamilton is stationed. The northwest Indian tribes are ready for war and are only held back by the refusal of the friendly Wyandots to join. The latter are demanding the return of Wa-pa-tee-tah, a religious teacher, whom they believe to be a prisoner. Hayward's mission is to assure the Wyandots that the man is not held by the soldiers. Rene asks Hayward to let her accompany him. She tells him that she is a quarter-blood Wyandot and a missionary among the Indians. She has been in search of her father. She insists that she has seen Hayward before, but in a British uniform. Hayward refuses her request and starts for the north accompanied by a scout named Brady and a private soldier. They come on the trail of a war party and to escape from the Indians take shelter in a hut on an island. Hayward finds a murdered man in the hut. It proves to be Raoul D'Auvray, a former French officer who is called by the Wyandots "white chief." Rene appears and Hayward is puzzled by her insistance that they have met before.

CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

How white her face was in the starlight, uplifted to mine. One hand grasped my sleeve.

"News! evil news! of my father?"

"Of Raoel D'Auvray; he was your father?"

"Yes! you say 'was'? he is dead?"

I caught the groping hand in mine, and held it tightly in the grasp of my fingers. She made no movement, but I could distinguish her quick breathing, see her dark eyes.

"Yes; you must listen quietly while I tell you all I know. We reached here at dusk. There was a band of Indian raiders camped yonder near the foot of the lake, and so we crossed over to this island to avoid them. We stumbled upon this hut while seeking a camping spot. It was dark, and apparently deserted. The front door was latched, but unlocked, and we ventured inside, feeling our way through the gloom, until we came to a door leading into the rear room. You know the arrangement?"

She did not respond, or remove her eyes from my face.

"When we opened this a huge mastiff leaped savagely at us. In the darkness he fastened his jaws on Brady's arm—the scout with me—and had to be killed by a knife thrust. Then we procured a light with which to search, and found the body of a man lying on the floor."

"Dead?"

"Murdered; his head crushed in from behind with an ax. He was an old man, with snow-white beard."

"How did you know he was Raoel D'Auvray?"

"By this medal pinned to his breast," I answered, holding it forth. "a French decoration."

She grasped it, bending her head so as to see better, and, for a moment, her slender form shook with an emotion she could not restrain. Involuntarily I reated a hand upon her shoulder, but the touch aroused her, and she stepped back, standing erect.

"The medal was his; he always wore it. But was that all? Was nothing else found?"

"There was a red army jacket flung across a box; but while we were eating later in the other room, someone stole in through the back door, and carried that away."

She raised her hands to her head, with a gesture of despair.

"I—I believe part of what you have told me," she confessed, her voice trembling. "It—it is in my heart to believe all, but—but I cannot. You are not telling me the truth—not all the truth. You knew of this house, you—you came here deliberately, and—and brought your men with you."

"I deny that, mademoiselle. We stumbled upon the place by accident."

"Oh, you drive me crazy with your denials!" she exclaimed passionately. "I will not listen longer. You are Joseph Hayward; you admit that yourself. No! do not talk to me, or attempt to stop me! I am going to my—my father."

I stood aside and let her pass, yet followed as she entered the door. The interior was black, except for a slight glow as from a dying fire showing dimly through the inner door. The dead dog lay in the middle of the floor and she stopped, staring at the grim shadow.

"I will bring the light," I said gently, "if you can permit me to pass."

As the yellow flame illumined the small room, her gaze deserted me, to rest once more upon the motionless figure lying near the wall, which Brady had mercifully covered with a blanket. She stood still, her hands clasped, her face like marble. Still holding the candle in one hand, I bent down, and drew back gently the edge of the blanket, exposing the dead man's face and white beard. In spite of his violent death the features were composed, in no way distorted; he appeared like one lying there asleep. For a moment the girl never stirred, her attitude strained, her wide-open, tearless eyes on the peaceful upturned countenance. It seemed to me she had even ceased to breathe. Then she sank slowly upon her knees beside the body, her head close to the cold cheek.

"Father! Father!" she sobbed, as if in sudden realization of the truth. "It is you!"

Her hat had fallen to the floor, and her wealth of dark hair unloosened completel, hid her face. She had forgotten my presence; everything but her grief. I drew back silently, stuck the sputtering candle on a box, where it burned bravely, and left the room. As I glanced back from the doorway, odd shadows flickered along the walls, and she still knelt there, a vague, indistinct figure. In the other room I found a chair, and sat down, staring dumbly into the smoldering fire.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mademoiselle's Story.

In the intense silence, the gloom of that room lit only by those smoldering embers, with Schultz sleeping undisturbed against the wall, my thought could not be divorced from the lonely girl sobbing above her dead. Was she of dual nature, womanly and savage by turn, as the instincts of two races dominated her action? Yet this could never account for her distrust of me, her continued insistence upon having previously known me. Ay! and she meant it! There was no attempt at deceit, no acting in all this; her full faith in the charge was written upon her face, found echo upon her lips. She believed me to be another man, a pretended British officer, a traitor to her people, a scoundrelly spy. Yet she applied to him my name. That was the strangest part of it all.

Even as I started toward the open door the girl herself appeared, outlined against the candle flame. She had bound up the loosened strands of hair, and her dark eyes, dry and tearless, looked straight at me. I doubt if she saw Schultz at all as she came forward, stopping only as her hand finally touched the table. As I watched her, my earlier determination died within me; I could only wait in silence for her to speak.

"Joseph Hayward," she said slowly, the words rasping a little with her effort at self-control. "You confess to that name, do you not?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," I answered, my lips dry, my eyes riveted on her face.

"Yet you still claim not to be the same Joseph Hayward whom I have known?"

"I am an ensign in the army of the United States, and have never worn a red coat."

She smiled, but the smile was not altogether pleasant. Then she said slowly, "Very well; have it so then. I do not in the least believe you, but am going to speak exactly as if I did. I am a girl, alone, and must turn to you for help. It makes no difference now if I am of Indian blood and ancestry, I am here alone with you. I have got to trust you, rely upon your word, ask your aid. You claim to know nothing of me, or mine. That there may be no possible mistake I will tell you—tell you about him," she pointed backward, with her hand, her voice breaking, "and—and about myself. You shall know all, and then you will dare pretend ignorance no longer. Listen, monsieur. The man lying dead yonder—murdered—was my father."

She leaned forward, resting her hands on the table, for support, the veins in her throat throbbing.

"I wish you would at least confess a knowledge of my tongue," she almost pleaded. "It is not in English I think, monsieur, and it is difficult for me to speak in that language."

"It would be a pleasure to confess anything that would aid you," I replied politely. "But I possess small understanding of French."

Her eyes darkened indignantly, and she made a forceful gesture indicative of her true thought of me.

"You continue to act your part well," she said scornfully, "even when there is no longer a necessity. Bah! I despise this play acting! It is unworthy a soldier. So you would have me tell over what you already know; you would make me stand here and suffer—"

"Mademoiselle," I interrupted swiftly, "I ask nothing. All I seek is the opportunity of service. There is no truth I am going to deny. To prove it I will say this—you have remained in my memory since the first hour we met. I desire your trust, your friendship; whatever you may tell me will be held sacred, inviolate. I will serve you though you speak no word, give no explanation. I beg the privilege."

I thought she would never speak, standing there before me in the dim light, swaying slightly, her bosom rising and falling with quick breathing. A great sympathy welled up in my heart, and all unconsciously, I extended my hands. She must have seen them, but she made no response, but the glitter of unshed tears was in her eyes.

"What is the use of our talking like this?" she said impetuously. "'T is as though we exchanged compliments in Montreal. Instead we are in the wilderness, with danger all about us. You are what you are, monsieur, and I am a woman of the Wyandots. Let all else pass; I care nothing whether your thoughts of me be good or evil. I am what I am; what birth and conditions have made me. All I appeal to in you is whatever of manhood you may still retain. I tell you my story, because you swear you know it not; then listen, and you shall. No, do not move, but hear me; I would not do this without reason."

She glanced aside at Schultz, and then into the red embers of the fire, her eyes coming slowly back to rest on my face.

"I am Rene D'Auvray, and my father lies dead there in the next room. He was all I had in the world, yet I knew little enough of him. He spoke seldom of his past life even to me. Still, I have much reason to believe that in his younger days he was intimate at the French court. I know he was a soldier, an officer of the king's guard, decorated for bravery. He never told me why he was exiled to this land buried in the far wilderness, made a companion of savages. I never asked, although my heart ached to do so, for he was not a man to be questioned lightly, and I early learned that the very thought brought him pain. But I know this, for I saw a letter once, a yellow, creased letter, which I think he purposely mislaid hoping I would see. He wanted me to know, yet had not the heart to tell me. It was from a French comrade in arms, and there was a crest on the paper, and a great name signed. I wept as I read, for the writer loved the man to whom he told the story, and the words came warm from his heart. Whatever else you may know of us, Monsieur Joseph Hayward, you have never known this. It was because of a lady my father loved, a relative of the king. For her sake he fought the Prince de Millier, and killed him in the royal garden. It was a fair fight, but the king saw it not so, for it disarranged his plans, and my father had to flee France to save his own life. Then was he proscribed, a price set upon his head."

She paused, and sank into a chair, bowing her face upon the table. I stood silent, unable to speak, the sound of her voice still in my ears. She looked up again, dashing her hand across her eyes.

"I must be far more French than Indian to become so weak," she explained, ashamed of the emotion. "'T is the memory of him lying yonder, monsieur, with no word—no last word—for me. So it was he came to America, but they would not let him rest in either Quebec or Montreal. They drove him forth into the woods, into the camps of Indians. He told me once about those days; of how he traversed the black waters of the Ottawa and met hardships on the great lakes, his companions voyageurs and courlers des bois, his only means of support the furs he could send back to Montreal. But he might not venture there himself, but was doomed forever to a life beyond civilization. His associations would have brutalized him, made him a fit denizen of those wilds, turned him also into a savage, but for one thing—he was a fervent Catholic. It was this which kept him ever gentle, sweet and strong. He possessed the passion to save souls; he became an evangel to the Indians among whom he lived. He was at Mackinac and Green Bay; he told the Pottawattomies of Christ, but they cast him out; he traveled to the villages of the Illinois, but the Jesuits were already there, and gave him no welcome. At last he found a home with the Wyandots. At first the task was not easy, for they were a savage people. They had tortured Jesuit priests to the stake, and flogged the Recollets who came also. But my father won their confidence; he went forth with them to battle; he went with them against their enemies, and so they finally listened to what he said. He became Wa-pa-tee-tah, the white chief, and taught them of Christ Jesus. They became Christians because they were proud of him. He accomplished what the priests could not do, and kept the tribe at peace with the whites. The English came, and hated him, for he would not enter into their schemes, nor permit his people to. Only once did he lead them to war, against your General Clark at Vincennes.

"Exiled and lonely, abandoning all hope of ever returning to France, or even civilization, my father finally, to increase his influence with the tribe, took for a wife a woman of the Wyandots. Although I was born of that union, yet I never saw my mother, who died when I was but a babe. I am told she was of fair complexion, but jet black hair and eyes, the daughter of a French trader and Indian mother, able to read and write. My father loved her, and taught her much that he had learned in early life. When she died he seemed to change, to lose interest in the past, to cease to dream longer of Europe. He became more fully a Wyandot. I was brought up in the camps of the tribe, living in their wigwams, sharing in their prosperity and adversity. I played with Indian children, and was cared for by Indian women. I must have been ten years old, monsieur, before I first realized that I was mainly of white blood, of another race. Yet when this knowledge came it brought with it sudden ambition."

Her eyes were upon the fire now, and her voice had lost its harshness.

"I remember when I went to my father—it was in a camp on the shores of the great lake—and made him tell me more of his own life and the life of my mother. What he said opened before me a fairyland. I began to dream and hope. He taught me the French tongue, and all the scraps of learning his memory retained. He sent to Quebec for books, and we studied them together. When I was sixteen he sent me to Montreal, to the convent of the Ursulines, and I was there three years. Then—then the Indian blood conquered, and I came back. The woods called me, and my father; besides," she made the sign of the cross, "God called me to the work I had to do."

"An Indian missionary?"

"To my own people. No! I was of no order—what was that?"

She arose to her feet listening.

CHAPTER IX.

The Return of Brady.

There was utter silence, except for the heavy breathing of the soldier still sound asleep on the bench. I could distinguish no noise without.

"It was like a cry, faint from a distance," she said, at last, "but I hear nothing now. Did you catch it, monsieur?"

"I heard only your voice."

"Then I may have been deceived, although I have the ears of an Indian."

Some sound caused me to wheel about, and I faced Brady, who had just stepped within and closed the door. His gray eyes surveyed us in one swift glance, settling inquiringly on the girl, who had arisen to her feet. Schultz awakened, sat up on the bench, blinking sleepily.

"Brady?"

"Of course; and who have you here, Master Hayward? A woman surely, by dress Indian, and by face white."

"This is Mamadoiselle D'Auvray," I replied, not liking his manner of speech, "the daughter of the man we found here dead."

"She was not in the house when I left. Oh, I remember! The same perchance who was at Fort Harmar, the one you told me about, and who threatened to follow us with Simon Girty. Truly, she must have kept her word, for that black renegade is here."

"Here! Girty? You saw him?"

"Ay! In the Indian camp out yonder. Nor was that all I saw. There is something savage on foot, or I am no woodsman. I thought those devils might have other quarry, and come back here to lie quiet in hiding, but I am not so sure now that we are not the ones sought. This girl belongs with them."

She stepped past me, and stood erect facing him, the dark eyes frankly meeting the gray.

"Yet I am not one of them," she said slowly in her careful English. "I am Wyandot; those you saw are Miamis and Ojibwas, thieves and murderers. My people are Christian, and are not at war."

"You were with them; with Girty," he insisted, but in somewhat kinder tone. "You came here direct from their camp."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

More Than He Needed.

"At the end of five hours and a half, if you are in town," said the judge, "you will be arrested on the same charge." "You may have five hours of that back," said the lawbreaker, "I can get along with the 30 minutes."

It's an Ill Wind, Etc.

"Poor Mr. Hennypeck!" exclaimed Brownson, sympathetically. "It wasn't enough that his wife should own and operate him, body and soul, Mrs. Hennypeck has now joined the suffragettes."

"Don't breathe a word," replied Smithson, "but Hennypeck is tickled to death. His wife speaks at all the outdoor meetings and is so hoarse when she gets home that she can't raise her voice above a whisper."—Puck.

His Fatal Mistake.

"My poor brother," said the retired bank burglar, "made a mistake in the selection of a vocation and finally starved to death."

"That was tough," rejoined the ex-porch climber. "By the way, what was his line?"

"He made a specialty of snatching purses from lady shoppers," answered the other with a deep, broad sigh.

Old-Fashioned.

"You say she is old-fashioned?"

"Oh, hopelessly so. She is still making a collection of picture postcards!"

Many a man turns over a new leaf one day and turns it back the next.

A really handsome woman is one whose mirror backs up her vanity.